

I would just like to close by mentioning I have supporters of this bill that include the National Association of Atomic Veterans, Physicians for Social Responsibility, the National Association of Radiation Survivors, the Intermountain Pediatric Society, the Utah Medical Association and the Utah State legislature. I encourage my colleagues to join me in cosponsoring this bill. I hope we bring it to speedy action on the floor.

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time of the gentlewoman from California (Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

PETROLEUM PRICES AND PRICES AT THE GAS PUMP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, here we go again. According to Reuters news agency today, oil prices held just below record highs on Wednesday as fund buying continued to dominate the market even though the United States Government said crude oil stocks had risen to their highest level for 8 months.

Looks like the Saudi campaign promised to keep prices low before the election has now come to pass. Now that we are past the inauguration, oil prices are going through the roof.

Today, U.S. light crude rose 11 cents to \$54.70, within a dollar of record highs hit last October. Oil prices are up, the dollar is down, and our economy is sputtering. And the demand for oil is just about to increase with summer and vacations coming on.

The stock market fell by more than 100 points today based on investors' fears about these rising oil prices. The price at the pump has also gone up significantly in the last few weeks if you have not noticed. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the average price at the pump this week is \$1.99, up seven cents from the end of February and a 26-cent increase from 1 year ago. What a down draft on economic growth that is. In fact, the gas price increase is up 15 percent. That is more than five times the rate of inflation.

Ohio's gasoline price at the pump today is 11½ cents up from the last week of February. Currently, Ohioans are paying over \$2.05 for their gasoline and the upward trend is not going to stop there. We in the Midwest are facing the highest increases in gasoline prices in the last year, with an increase

of over 32 cents a gallon. That is over four cents higher than any other region of the country. Residents in Cleveland are paying today more than \$2.07 a gallon, an increase of over 12 cents from the last week of February and over 33 cents per gallon from a year ago.

What is truly dangerous and tragic about this trend is our continued dependence on imported sources of oil. It means that our Nation is strategically vulnerable to disruptions in those with over half of the petroleum we use imported. That is why, when I asked Secretary Donald Rumsfeld this week when he was before our defense committee what he was doing as the Secretary of the largest Cabinet agency in the government of the United States to help lead America to a new energy era, I was very surprised to hear his answer, which I quote from the record: The Department of Defense has no authority to do anything about oil. Needless to say, we don't get funds appropriated by this committee for doing things that relate to reducing our Nation's dependency on oil.

I was shocked at his answer since we were considering the supplemental appropriation bill this week for the Defense Department, and just in the supplemental, there is over \$1.41 billion related to unforeseen fuel price increases, for fuel delivery costs. For instance, the Defense Logistics Agency is going to pay \$742,300,000 more just in the supplemental; the Marine Corps, \$311,380,000; and the list goes on and on. Indeed, the Institute of Local Self-Reliance, in a report done just a few years ago, says that in any fiscal year, our government spends over \$100 billion just allowing oil to flow into this country. We are not inventing any new energy sources. We are just becoming more dependent every day.

Imagine an America that was energy independent again and where energy independence rose to be a real national priority. Biofuels that our farmers can grow could displace a huge amount of imported petroleum in the short term. Not 10 years from now, but within 3 years, we could displace 25 percent of what we currently burn in our tanks with ethanol-based fuel and biodiesel-based fuel and other derivatives. Yet the Bush administration, is it trying to move America in a more independent direction? No. They are cutting their support for biofuels, the minimal amount of research and development dollars in the Department of Agriculture, by over \$100 million this year alone. Grain-based ethanol and grain-based biodiesel truly can help America wheel her way to a new energy future.

The American people need a new Declaration of Independence. We need to cut the umbilical cord to Saudi Arabia and the Middle East and every other undemocratic regime around this earth to which we are attached because of our oil dependence. There is no better

time than now to begin. I just wish someone in the Bush administration was paying attention to the gouging going on at the pumps across this country and the fact that Americans cannot buy biodiesel and ethanol even when they want it and when Detroit is manufacturing cars that can use it.

Ask yourself, who has got a lockout at the pumps across this country? Freedom for America in the 21st century should mean freedom from dependence on imported petroleum.

AMTRAK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am pretty excited about the fact that we are going to spend an hour discussing Amtrak. I do not think anybody in this country knows more about transportation and transportation infrastructure and the needs of transportation than the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR). I have asked him to give us kind of a broad background, bringing us up to date as to how we arrived where we are as far as Amtrak is concerned in this country. And then we will go to the other speakers.

I yield to the gentleman from Minnesota.

Mr. OBERSTAR. I thank the gentlewoman for yielding but, more importantly, I commend her and acknowledge her courageous leadership in being such a strong and consistent advocate for passenger rail service as our senior member and ranking member on the Subcommittee on Railroads on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

America is a third world country when it comes to passenger rail service. That abysmal condition did not happen by accident. It happened by design. The slow, inexorable process of deterioration of rail passenger service began in the 1960s when the freight railroads, which were also carrying passengers and carrying U.S. mail on the railroad post office, the RPO overnight distribution service, began to combine with the United States Postal Service to terminate the RPOs because their passenger rail service was not profitable unless mail service was included in the revenue stream. So the RPO would work the mail overnight and drop it off along the route. They would pick up passengers and carry them to their ultimate destination, but if the U.S. Postal Service would drop the RPO, that line, that segment of service, would then be unprofitable. And then they could apply, the railroads, to the Interstate Commerce Commission for discontinuance on economic grounds of unprofitability.

I witnessed that process happening in our State of Minnesota and in my congressional district when I was then administrative assistant to my predecessor in Congress. By the time I was elected to Congress, passenger rail service had disappeared. The railroads shed all of their so-called unprofitable lines in cooperation with the U.S. Postal Service, and the Federal Government then to ensure that there would be a vestige of passenger rail service in America took over, accepted the liability and the responsibility of carrying on with passenger rail and set up the Amtrak Corporation, American Rail Passenger Service Corporation.

But what did they get, Amtrak? They got the remnants, rundown rail cars, rundown locomotives. They got the rail service through the worst sections, the industrial, rundown, in many cases abandoned industrial sections of America's cities, not the very attractive segments of rail passenger, not the High Sierras and the beautiful western routes. They got on the east coast and the center of America and urban centers, the places passengers did not want to see, that they could avoid with their automobiles. And slowly Amtrak had to plead and beg and wheedle and cajole for funds to invest in upgrading the track, upgrading the passenger cars, upgrading the locomotives to continue these vestiges of service, both long haul and short haul.

The problem with rail passenger service in America is that Amtrak never received the investment dollars it needed to remake the entire passenger rail system. In France, President De Gaulle convened a meeting of his cabinet in 1968 and proposed that the cabinet approve funding for a study of and recommendation for a completely new high speed rail passenger service. The report came back 6 months later. The Cabinet was convened again and the report presented; the cost, \$12 billion in today's dollars. Every one of the ministers said, oh, that will hurt defense. It will hurt health. It will hurt education. Charles De Gaulle asked one question: Does any other country in the world have high speed, 185-mile-an-hour rail passenger service? And the answer was no. De Gaulle said: Then France will be the first.

That is what I call political will. That is what it took to launch this investment. And now you have the TGV, *Tres Grande Vitesse*, that goes from Paris to Lyon, 288 miles, in 2 hours and 1 minute. When I was a student in Europe in college, I took that train. It took 4½ hours. Today, it is 2 hours and 1 minute. When I traveled from Paris to Brussels to begin my studies at the College of Europe, it was a 6-hour trip. Today, it is a 45-minute trip.

Two hundred sixty-four million people ride the Shinkansen high speed train in Japan at 186 miles an hour. They have had one accident. A portion

of land subsidence occurred; no fatalities, in 30-plus years.

They have had one accident with the TGV. No fatalities. We have the ICE in Germany. We have the Talgo in Spain. We have high speed train service in Italy. And in America, the world's number one economy, the best we can do is, for a few miles, 125 miles an hour on Amtrak in the Northeast Corridor? That is wrong.

We need to make the investment in this passenger rail service. All it takes is political will. This administration has demonstrated, rather than stand up for and invest in rail passenger service, strengthen America's cities, take short haul aviation out of our skies, serve those routes of 300 miles or less with high speed passenger rail; they want to disinvest, drive Amtrak into bankruptcy, wash their hands of the issue and walk away from it. That is wrong. That keeps America as a third world country.

□ 1745

We got there by accident. We can get out of this problem by design, by responsible investment in the future of rail passenger service. Others will talk about the infamous September 11 when 5,240 aircraft, commercial airplanes came out of the skies, and all of the radar screens of our aircraft control system went dark. Amtrak was operating.

We must not wait for another tragedy to shut down an important segment of transportation and come to the realization we should have been investing in Amtrak. I salute the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) for her commitment, for her dedication, for raising this issue, taking this time to bring to the American public the need for investment in Amtrak.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Would you answer just one question for me before you leave. Can you let me know whether there is any form of transportation that pays for itself?

You know, we have been raising this issue about aviation, and, you know, we put billions of dollars, I forget how many billions into aviation, and we talk about our transportation bill, we have it on the floor today, and we are putting it in.

But is there any mode of transportation in the whole world that pays for itself?

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, transportation is a public service. It is a means of moving people and goods in the public interest. And every industrialized nation in the world supports, with public funds, their public transportation.

Let us not fool ourselves. The freight railroads would like to say, oh, we do not use public funds. But to get the freight railroads started in America, the United States Government gave

them land. Every other section of land from the Mississippi River to the West Coast, the Pacific Ocean to build their railroads.

Without that land and the rights to the minerals and the lumber on that property, they would not have been able to build these railroads. They are still living off the profitability of the land that they were given in the public interest to serve the public interest.

And the same with aviation. Yes, there is a passenger ticket tax that pays for a great deal of our airport improvement program, air traffic control system; but the public funds pay for at least 15 percent of air traffic controllers' costs, pays for the research and development and new ideas in aviation.

And our highway and transit system, the passengers do not pay for every mile of road construction or every new bridge construction. A good deal of that comes out of public funds, either at the county, State, or city level.

And maritime just as well. Our maritime freight shipping operations are supported by the operating differential subsidy and construction differential subsidy programs to which we have committed well over \$12 billion over the years that I have served in the Congress.

So the gentlewoman's point is well taken. Transportation is a service in the public interest, and the public should give it a reasonable level of investment and support.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, now the gentlewoman from Indiana (Ms. CARSON).

Ms. CARSON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) for providing this special hour on Amtrak and having this very vital discussion about Amtrak's solvency and its future and its employees.

And I certainly thank the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), the ranking member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, for that insightful overall perspective, historical perspective, of rail in the United States of America and abroad.

It is my pleasure to be here tonight with my very dear friend, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN), and to thank her very much for leading the fight to retain Amtrak and its employees.

Amtrak continues to demonstrate its value as a critical public resource, unequivocally worthy of our Federal funds. The past 3 years have been among the most successful in Amtrak's 30-year history, 34-year history.

Despite an overall downturn in the travel industry that has resulted in financial disaster for our airlines, Amtrak has been making great strides in efficiency while becoming an increasingly popular choice for consumers. It remains a vital component of our Nation's infrastructure, providing an invaluable public service unmatched by any other means of transportation.

Since 2002, our rail system has gone through an exceptional period of financial and operating stability. Amtrak has established new accounting and financial reporting systems, trimmed mail and express rail operations, truncated long distance routes and cut expenses while raising ridership and engaging in the large-scale repair and restoration of an aged fleet.

Last year, the 240 employees of Beech Grove, Indiana, which is in my district, a heavy maintenance facility, repaired and returned to service 15 wrecked Superliners and locomotives.

And as all of us recall the 9/11 fiasco, consumers turned to Amtrak to continue their commuting to work and other ways. When Amtrak was established by an act of Congress in 1970 to take over for the money-losing private passenger rail systems in America, then Secretary of Transportation John Volpe predicted that Amtrak could turn a profit, but only if the Federal Government provided enough capital to produce high-speed trains and profitable corridors.

What better investment could Congress make to ensure the preservation of 22,000 jobs of the Amtrak employees and to preserve the vital services for consumers around the country who rely daily on Amtrak services.

According to the Congressional Research Service, Amtrak's fastest train, the Acela, averages 86 miles per hour in the New York to Washington corridor. And I am telling you, if I lived in New York or New Jersey, my transportation would be Amtrak. I love it. I love to ride Amtrak back and forth to New York and to New Jersey, and I am sure the other passengers do too.

So it is my strongest, strongest request and hope that Congress will do what it should do in terms of maintaining Amtrak and funding it at the proper levels so that it can remain efficient and solvent for many years to come.

And I want to again thank the ranking member, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN), for her leadership in this regard, a very vital service for the United States of America.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, now I would bring up the gentleman from California (Mr. COSTA). He is new to the Congress, but not new to the fight as far as passenger rail is concerned. He has a history that precedes him in the legislature in California.

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Congresswoman from Florida for her vision and for her leadership and ensuring that the people of America understand what is at stake today in the President's proposal to cut funding for Amtrak, which I believe, Mr. Speaker and Members, is unfair and lacking in vision.

I would like to confine my comments to focusing not only on the impact na-

tionally as it relates to a true intermodal transportation system, but also that in the 21st Century, if we in fact are going to provide the services necessary to move goods and services and people throughout our great country, we have to have a true intermodal 21st-century system of transportation, one that allows connectivity of our cities, of our States, to ensure that we handle the growth necessary to continue to improve the economy.

And that is why the President's proposal in his budget is unfair and it is lacking in vision. We saw on 9/11 the impact when our air service across the country was virtually grounded, and how dependent we are upon our daily rail service as it relates to not just intercity travel but our commuter service as well, in which Amtrak provides a tremendous amount of service in terms of our cities for commuter purposes.

And what we saw was a greater reliance in which the northeast corridor exceeded the amount of passenger daily usage of our air transportation for months and months and months as we attempted to reconstruct our service.

Mr. Speaker and Members, let me give you the California perspective. Amtrak operates an average of 70 inner-city trains in California alone, over 200 commuter trains per day in California. In 2004, Amtrak serviced over 9.3 million people in California, providing service in 70 California cities.

It employs over 3,589 California residents. On top of that, when you look at the top five busiest corridors in Amtrak across the country, three of them, three of them are in California. Number two, the Pacific Surfliner provides service for over 2.3 million riders in California and it increases annually, 7.6 percent last year over 2003.

The number third busiest corridor in the Nation is the capital corridor, from San Jose to Sacramento to Auburn. It provided over 1.1 million riders last year for over a 2.3 percent increase over 2003.

And number five, the San Joaquin services, which I have been involved with for many years from Bakersfield, Oakland, Sacramento provides service to over 700,000 riders annually.

And when you take into account the cutbacks in regional airline service for mid-sized and smaller communities, in many cases this is the only public transportation service people have on a regional basis.

When you add to the commuter trains that operate in California that combined carry over 66,000 commuter ridership daily in the Bay Area and Los Angeles and San Diego and Oceanside areas, you understand how important it is to California.

As a matter of fact, California has the second highest ridership in the Nation, second only to New York. In addi-

tion to that, our State provides, and I have been involved as was mentioned earlier, when I have served in the State Legislature over \$70 million a year to enhance the existing Amtrak service.

California does more than any State in the Union to provide additional funds to improve our inner-city and commuter service. When you look at it over the last 15 years, California has provided \$1.5 billion to improve and upgrade our services. Amtrak in return during that same 15-year period has provided over \$400 million to upgrade and to improve our services.

The bottom line is we estimate in California alone in the next 20 years that we are going to have a 300 percent growth in our inner-city service and commuter service in California to sustain the population growth that is estimated to be another 15 to 17 million people.

And we are going to depend mightily on an intermodal transportation system that combines the best of our air service along with our rail service, along with our roads. And therefore it is fitting and appropriate this afternoon that we have this discussion, and I want to again thank the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) for setting this time aside.

We all know, if we study our Nation's history, that every mode of transportation going back to the 18th century has been subsidized in one form or another.

□ 1800

The canal system that first began to connect our States, the Erie Canal and the other canals, was what? The Federal Government helped finance that for the purpose of promoting interstate trade and commerce, and we continued into the 18th and 19th centuries. The great emancipator, President Lincoln, in the middle of the perhaps most difficult time in America's history, the great Civil War, when inflation was running rampant and deficits were huge, decided to build the Transcontinental Railroad.

In the 20th century, we have seen the expansion in our interstate freeway system that has been subsidized by Federal, State and local revenues. Every port and harbor in America today has some form of local, State or Federal funding.

All modes of our transportation historically for three centuries have had a subsidization to what? Promote trade, commerce and move our people around. So, therefore, when we take that in light of our history and where we are today and where we want to be in the 21st century, it is absolutely essential that we be promoting and expanding our intercity rail service throughout the Nation to ensure that, in the 21st Century, Americans have the proper type of intermodal transportation system that is reflective of the world's number one economy.

For all of those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I urge the Congress to act appropriately and to ensure that we properly fund our Amtrak service throughout America today.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, would you believe that 66 percent of the American people support Amtrak? Not 66 percent from the Red States or the Blue States, but 66 percent of the American people.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS), a member of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and a leader in this country on transportation and infrastructure.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman, first of all, for having this special order this evening. I also thank her for her leadership as the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Railroads of our Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. I feel very fortunate to be a part of that subcommittee, and I thank her for her vigilance and constantly standing up for people who need a voice.

Certainly, there is no question about it this evening, Mr. Speaker, that there are a number of people that, just this morning and this evening, as a matter of fact, are crowded on trains trying to get home, many of them having worked all day, glad to be able to sit down and relax as they ride home in an efficient and fast system of which Amtrak has structured itself and made available to them.

The interesting thing that we face is that, so often, when we have good things going for us and they are working, sometimes folk like to tinker with them. And when they tinker with them, quite often they lose a lot of their effectiveness, and a lot of times they are thrown off the track.

But the fact is that here we have a case where the President basically, by his actions, and I know he says otherwise, puts this very important system, this system that I just spoke about, that so many people take advantage of, and certainly those in my district do, is about to take it and put it in a situation which would make it almost impossible to operate.

So it is; I rise today to join my colleagues on both sides of the aisle in again expressing our strong support for Amtrak, our national intercity passenger rail service. Regrettably, this expression of support is necessary because the President has proposed eliminating Federal assistance for Amtrak from the fiscal 2006 budget, contrary to what the public wants, as our ranking member just stated, with over 60 percent saying they want to see Amtrak supported, and they certainly want to see Amtrak survive.

The simple fact of the matter is that the elimination of Federal aid to Amtrak will send the system into bank-

ruptcy, where the service could be liquidated. Liquidation of Amtrak is simply not in our national interest. As a matter of fact, if we did not have Amtrak, we would have to invent it. The fiscal 2006 budget passed by Congress must include Federal aid for Amtrak at a level to support the system's continued operation.

Unfortunately, the President's proposal to eliminate Federal funding for Amtrak is not a new one. Particularly during the last 5 years, Amtrak has repeatedly faced threatened shutdowns and proposed elimination of its operating subsidy. These threats have done nothing to improve Amtrak's service but have created continued uncertainty among Amtrak's 25 million annual passengers and 20,000 employees.

I believe that it is time that we bring to a close the prolonged debate about national passenger rail service in which we have been engaged in recent years by recommitting ourselves to Amtrak and to the value of national passenger rail service.

Over the past 30 years, intercity passenger rail service provided by Amtrak has become essential to ensuring mobility in every corner of our Nation. Amtrak provides its 25 million intercity passengers with access to more than 500 stations in 46 States, including access to more than 100 cities that have no commercial air service.

Amtrak also provides mobility to many segments of our population who might not otherwise be able to travel. According to the results of a study outlined in a 2004 Congressional Research Service report, approximately 42 percent of Amtrak's ridership is drawn from households with incomes less than \$50,000, while 16 percent of its riders do not own their own cars.

In creating Amtrak, Congress and the Nation made a commitment to the value of maintaining a national passenger rail service. It is long past time for Congress to clearly define the nature of this commitment and to honor this commitment by providing sufficient and reliable funding to Amtrak to enable it to succeed as a transportation service.

Our commitment must be a national commitment to national rail service. Congress must not shift the responsibility for funding our national intercity passenger rail service to the individual States which cannot afford to meet it and which cannot guide a truly national, seamless, intercity passenger rail service.

In examining how Amtrak can be strengthened, Congress must look broadly at all aspects of Amtrak service, including its relationship with freight railroads, and we must establish clear objectives for Amtrak that emphasize excellent national service. Congress must also demand that Amtrak respond to our investment by developing and implementing a workable

plan to provide the most efficient and cost-effective service possible. Such a plan must include appropriate benchmarks for measuring progress. And Congress must be vigilant in demanding accountability from that system.

Finally, America has had an intercity passenger rail service for more than 150 years, and this service remains an essential component of our transportation network. I urge the Congress to renew our commitment to intercity passenger rail service and to move past the annual struggle over Amtrak by creating a reliable funding stream and to embark on a concerted effort to enable this service to realize its full potential.

One hundred and fifty years of rail service, the fact is that, now, that same service is under our watch, and so it is up to each of us, each one of us and the President, to ensure that that service lasts for another 150 years, so that when generations yet unborn look back at what we did in 2005, they can say that we sent a powerful message to the future, and that is that we cared about Amtrak and that we cared about the passenger who simply wants to move from one place to another to have the very, very best lives that they can.

With that, I again thank the gentlewoman for her vigilance and leadership.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, may I ask the gentleman one question before he leaves?

I know that the gentleman comes from Baltimore, which is a big city, and many people look at the big city and know that we need Amtrak. But would the gentleman believe that 109 small cities do not have any other form of transportation? They do not have bus service, nor do they have air service.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, if the gentlewoman would yield further, I often ride from Baltimore up to Connecticut on Amtrak, and I see some of the little small stops that we stop at. The stations are very small, but the fact is that people get on the train and people get off the train. And I say to myself, I wonder what they would do if we did not have that kind of service? That is the kind of sensitivity that we have and that we must maintain. Then we have got to take our beliefs and make sure we turn them into action.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, it is now my pleasure to yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr. BISHOP), also a leader on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. BISHOP of New York. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman. Let me start by thanking the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) for organizing this time this evening and

particularly for her leadership on this and so many other issues of great importance to our Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight in support of Amtrak, America's national rail system. As a personal beneficiary of the service that Amtrak provides and as someone who represents a congressional district that counts on safe, reliable rail service, I am a strong supporter of providing this vital industry the funding necessary to continue operations.

A healthy Amtrak is an integral part of New York and the Nation's economy and transportation systems. Amtrak offers riders a cost-effective way to travel throughout the country. It has over 2,000 employees, serves over 500 stations in 46 States and owns and operates over 700 miles of shared track throughout the country.

These numbers tell the story. Amtrak is a major industry helping to support families and towns throughout the country, and it requires our support now.

The administration budget proposal to eliminate funding for Amtrak flies in the face of common sense and the President's stated goal of sensibly growing this Nation's economy. The events of September 11, 2001, showed us America's reliance on the rail system and Amtrak in particular. As planes sat grounded everywhere, goods, services and people continued to move, thanks in large part to Amtrak.

The President's budget proposal indicates that with regard to passenger rail, we have not learned enough from that terrible day. There is hardly a more clear example of misguided priorities at the Federal level. Current plans will force a major employer to shut its doors, move people out of secure employment and cripple a transportation system that serves millions of people. We need to abandon this approach that will end national rail service and, instead, look for ways to improve upon our existing structure of supporting rail lines.

Abandoning Amtrak will destroy a system that has never been supported adequately. In comparison to the rest of the world, we rank a miserable 25th on the list of countries that provide commuter rail funding. The U.S. is outpaced by countries like Estonia, Belgium and Slovenia.

It is no wonder that we are debating investment in Amtrak. We have never provided the adequate assistance that would allow Amtrak to operate at full capacity, thereby providing no baseline for comparison now that the President is proposing to eliminate the program.

Over 30 years ago, Amtrak replaced a faltering private rail system failing to provide adequate services. Now, 30 years later, we are attempting to replace an existing public passenger rail system with some undefined private system by stripping funding for a

struggling but improving system that America supports. We should not continue this cycle, and I urge my colleagues to oppose this proposal, as it represents an unclear approach to a very serious issue.

Congress continues to focus on funding other transportation modes over Amtrak to the detriment of the rail industry. Amtrak's level of funding represents only 2 percent of the U.S. Department of Transportation's nearly \$60 billion budget; whereas over 50 percent of the Department's spending went for highways, and nearly \$20 billion went for air travel.

□ 1815

The fact is that America relies on Amtrak to move people. Commuter rail systems would be faced with major roadblocks and possible route elimination if Amtrak lost funding. So we are not just talking about an effect on Amtrak's customers alone. Over 850,000 commuters a day rely on Amtrak or its infrastructure to get to and from work, and it simply makes no sense to eliminate funding for a program that benefits nearly 1 million commuters a day.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to fight for the continued operation of Amtrak by advocating for a budget providing \$1.8 billion for fiscal year 2006. I thank the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) for her leadership on this issue.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the gentleman: Can he repeat how much we are proposing to spend this year on Amtrak?

Mr. BISHOP of New York. The President's budget proposes zero.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Zero.

Mr. BISHOP of New York. And what we need is a budget of at least \$1.8 billion.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, \$1.8 billion. Would the gentleman believe that we are spending \$1 billion a week in Iraq, \$4 billion a month in Iraq, and with \$3 billion, it would completely fund the Amtrak system and bring it up to date. The people that pay the bill are getting the short end of the stick.

Mr. BISHOP of New York. Indeed they are. This country has a long history of finding the money to support things that it considers to be a priority, and we simply need to come together and say that this kind of passenger rail service is a priority.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to yield to the delegate from the District of Columbia who is a leader on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and has been on that committee ever since I have been here in Congress for over 12 years, and I know longer, but certainly is the voice for

transportation, not just in the District, but in the country.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding and for her kind words. Yes, I have been on this committee for 14 years, and I am very pleased to see the gentlewoman become the new leader of the Subcommittee on Railroads and already, in this and other ways, is offering excellent leadership. The gentlewoman is going to be tested, because she faces a crisis like no Chair of that committee has faced, with possible loss all together of Amtrak; and I congratulate her for taking hold and having no fear, but then the gentlewoman is known to be fearless.

Mr. Speaker, it is unthinkable that in the post-9/11 era we are leaving large parts of our country with little or no transportation. It began with the airlines, deregulation in the 1980s and, in order to accomplish that, some good things came from it, but some not-so-good things came from it, because they had to pull out of many markets that are not unprofitable, given the deregulation. Even before 9/11, all the airlines were, as it were, in the hospital. Every last one of them, union controlled or not, of large airlines is now in intensive care, to be polite about how badly off they are. So much for the airlines already not serving huge blocks of the country.

West Coast communities and communities in the South are now up in arms as Greyhound is about to pull out of those communities. Because when the Federal Government took over Amtrak, we closed down half of Amtrak. So all they had was Greyhound, and now Greyhound is gone. Yet, I am on the Select Committee on Homeland Security working on security. It looks like there is no way to get out of many communities in the United States of America.

As the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) knows, we just passed a major transportation bill, finally. Yet, we are systematically starving transportation in our country, and if I can say that about bus and airlines because, after all, they are subsidized.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, would the gentlewoman yield?

Ms. NORTON. I am pleased to yield to the gentlewoman from Florida.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. We are working on the bill; hopefully, we will pass it tomorrow. But I want to point out, we are looking at a bill that is \$284 billion, and our Department of Transportation indicated that we needed \$375 billion. So we are way behind. This is because this Bush administration does not support the investments that we really need to make in transportation, and that is why we are 17 months behind passing a transportation bill that the country and all of

the Governors, the local communities, the private sector, they all need this investment, because our infrastructure in the United States is falling apart.

Ms. NORTON. Well, I thank the gentlewoman, and I thank her for reminding us that we have not even passed this bill yet; we are supposed to get to that tomorrow. And we are 17 months late in passing this, and there is much to complain about with this bill. Even though the buses have dedicated funding through the highways and the airlines have dedicated funding through the airports, there is no dedicated funding for rail. How did rail get left out?

We are trying to be a great power on the cheap, because I never heard of a great power that did not have first-class rail service. We understand that apparently about airlines; that is why we subsidize the airlines. Particularly in the post-9/11 era, I can tell my colleagues that after the terrible tragedy at the Pentagon, there was really only one way to get out of the District of Columbia. They closed Reagan National Airport for 2 weeks. I do not know how the gentlewoman got home to Jacksonville, because she sure did not get home out of this jurisdiction.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, if the gentlewoman will yield, our local Coast Guard came to Washington and carried the Florida delegation home.

Ms. NORTON. Amazing.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. And it took all day, because the group was stationed out of Jacksonville, so we flew from here to Miami, then we went to Fort Lauderdale, Orlando, then to Jacksonville. That was the only way we could get out of the city.

But let me mention to the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia, after September 11, there was another plane that went down in New York. I do not know whether you remember that; it went down in Queens.

Ms. NORTON. Yes.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. I was in New York at that time. I had checked out of the hotel, and the hotel would not let us back in. We did not know what was going on. And everything shut down, like the gentlewoman said. The airport shut down; the bridges shut down. There was no way out of the city.

I went to the Amtrak station and there I saw several Members of the Senate and the House, and that is how we were able to get out of New York City and get back into Washington, D.C. It is a safety issue. Why would the richest country in the world even consider not having a rail transportation to move people in time of crisis.

Ms. NORTON. The gentlewoman has documented the point I think dramatically, even involving the Members of this body. We cannot afford to leave major cities of the United States de-

pendent on one form of transportation. That is how the Capital of the United States was left. We just heard the gentlewoman from Florida talk about New York being left in the same way. Who would, as the gentlewoman says, want to even risk that?

We are not alone, Madam Chair. Under the gentlewoman's leadership, we are already seeing action in the other body. I was pleased to see that Senator CONRAD BURNS all the way out in Montana is talking about Amtrak and about saving Amtrak. Six Republicans have already joined him. There is going to be a huge bipartisan effort here. I think we are going to be successful, because there is no recourse. There is no alternative to making sure that we have a national railroad.

The worst part of what the administration is doing is trying to deliberately force Amtrak into bankruptcy.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, if the gentlewoman will yield, it is truly hard to believe how an administration could state that it is their goal to put an industry out of business and put them in bankruptcy. To me, it is just a clear example that we have gotten our priorities wrong.

I think that this debate should not be between Democrats and Republicans, House and Senate. I think this debate, I think it is very important for the American people to weigh in on why they think it is important. One of the things that I think has been a failure is that we have not been able to convey the importance of rail service in this country.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for making that point, because I hope we do not have to lose it before people understand how much they need it. The notion of bankruptcy, well, there is a bankruptcy of policy, if bankruptcy is all one can think about for a public service that the country cannot do without.

We know that bankruptcy has not done anything for the airlines. We have had several airlines go into bankruptcy. They go, they come out, but because they are a public service, they have to go a certain number of places. And guess what? They need some kind of subsidy, and they certainly have gotten some, even though we have required them to operate as businesses.

We used to require the railroads to operate as businesses; but beginning in 1971, the Congress understood that the business model did not work for railroads. It does not work for railroads anywhere in the United States. Yet that is what we have here: bankruptcy. Because policy is being determined by ideology, the ideology that says that if the private sector cannot do it, then maybe we do not need it, and that is why the gentlewoman's point is so important.

Somebody needs to get up and tell the Congress and tell the administra-

tion that they do need it. It is not ideology that should decide whether the Nation is going to have railroads; it is old fashioned American pragmatism. We took them over, eliminating half of the lines in 1971, because the private sector said, hey, there is no profit in this. What makes us think there is profit in it now, when even we do not want to give a subsidy that would be required of us as a public body.

I want to alert Members here. They may think that we are talking about the Amtrak that they see here every day; you know, the Amtrak that goes to Pennsylvania Railroad, the Amtrak of Union Station. I am talking about the Amtrak that exists in 46 States, I say to the gentlewoman. That is the Amtrak I am talking about. The Amtrak that affects each and every Member of the House and Senate. I think we ought to alert Members what we are really talking about. We are talking about the national network that we call Amtrak that, in fact, serves the entire United States. If Amtrak were an airline, it would be the eighth largest airline in the United States.

The thing that most gets me about what it is that the administration apparently says it wants to do, and here I am quoting what Secretary Norm Mineta said when the President's budget came over here, that they want to change funding responsibilities to the States on a 50-50 match. Give me a break. Hey, if the Federal Government cannot stand these costs, are we serious that the States, which are now facing huge Medicaid costs, huge shifts of the Federal budget to them, huge effects of the tax cuts, are going to now be able to pick up Amtrak and keep it going?

This is a scandal and a scandal that we must break before it goes any further. If they think that this is like the ordinary bankruptcy where a company comes in and picks up the pieces on the cheap, yes, you can pick up the pieces on the cheap, but can you run a railroad. I think what we now know is that you cannot run a railroad without subsidy.

We will not be the first country in the world to run it without subsidy, and the reason they talk about 50-50 with the States is they know that the private sector cannot run it without a subsidy, so they want to shift the costs of the subsidy to the private sector. Watch out, everybody in the House. They are coming your way, and we have to keep the costs where the tax base is broadest, here in the House, not on the tax bases of each and every State which are having a hard enough time keeping their own transportation going.

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Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that there is no mode of transportation, including rail, that pays for itself, not

only here in the United States but nowhere in the world. Public transportation is just that. We subsidize every forming of transportation.

I really welcome this debate because I think we have been nickeling and diming Amtrak to death, and now we need to put up or shut up. And I think the American people, where 66 percent, not from the blue States and the red States, but 66 percent of the American people said that they want passenger rail in this country.

Ms. NORTON. I think that is an awfully important point to make. With that supermajority it does not seem to me that the administration can succeed in eliminating Amtrak if we do our work here in the Congress. They talk about leaving the commuter rail lines there. Well, it is interesting to hear the railroad administration say that they are unable and unqualified to help operate those rail lines. I am not sure what the administration is after there. Of course, those are the parts of Amtrak that people use to get back and forth to work.

This is not very well thought out. It seems to me, if you took about 5 minutes thinking about it, you would have to come up with another solution. In fact, let us assume that I think the best way to come to grips with what the administration is seeking to do, let us assume that they got their way and somehow or another they went into bankruptcy and some company came and picked it up on the cheap, nothing resembling the present coverage could possibly survive. I mean, some private person, because you have a bottom line, you have stockholders, would do what you got to do, and he would pick off the most profitable, there is a tiny part that is profitable maybe between Boston and New York and say, the rest of you are on your own. You would have one corridor or so railroad. Nothing resembling the kind of coverage that we have now would be possible.

I do want to point out something because as a lawyer, I got interested when I learned something from my staff. I said, wait a minute, I have to look into this. There are so many impossible missions we have given Amtrak. They have modernized and done a very good job of doing that.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. I want to point out ridership on Amtrak is up 1 million passengers. People are using the services. You lawyers do this, suppose this. Well, let me just say, my position is what happens when failure is not an option. We cannot fail the American people on this issue. This issue is bigger than us. This is bigger than the Congress. This is about the future of America. It is about post-9/11 and whether or not we are going to provide the safety that the American people need. We are talking about homeland security. This is homeland security.

We have got to make sure that we can move people and not just invest in operations, but we need to invest in safety, and not just for Amtrak but for all of the systems. Because look what happened in Madrid when the Amtrak was bombed. I mean, those are the kinds of things that we need to be looking into. How can we make sure the system is safe for the ridership?

This administration is short-minded. They have their priorities backwards in many areas. And certainly, I feel that, I guess when you get a 53 percent mandate, you got it going on. But as far as I am concerned, the American people need to understand, and I think it is our job to help educate them on the importance of Amtrak and give them a method that they can communicate to us and let us know that Amtrak is important.

With that, I am proposing that we do a series of whistle stops throughout the country. I think the Members need to get out into the districts, ride the train, and talk to the people that are doing that ridership. And we are working on that, and we are organizing that. And I hope that the gentlewoman will participate because I think that the best thing to do is to have townhall meetings where the people can give us direct input.

This is the people's House, and we represent the people of the United States, and we are closer to them. We have to come before them every 2 years. And so I think this would be one avenue with those whistle stops, to get out and talk to the American people and hear what they have to say about Amtrak.

My hour is up. I am going to close by just saying, what do you do when failure is not an option? Failure is not an option when it comes to Amtrak. We must have Amtrak passenger rail service in this country.

The current funding issues concerning Amtrak brings up a fundamental question of where this Nation stands on public transportation. We have an opportunity to improve a system that serves our need for passenger rail service, or we can let it fall apart, and leave this country's travelers and businesses with absolutely no alternative form of public transportation.

Without the funding Amtrak needs to keep operating, we will soon see people that rely on Amtrak to get them to work each day, waiting for a train that isn't coming.

We continue to subsidize highways and aviation, but when it comes to our passenger rail system, we refuse to provide the money Amtrak needs to survive.

This issue is so much bigger than just transportation. This is about safety and national security. Not only should we be giving Amtrak the money it needs to continue providing service, we should be providing security money to upgrade their tracks and improve safety and security measures in the entire rail system.

Once again we see the Bush Administrations paying for its failed policies by cutting

funds to vital public services and jeopardizing more American jobs. This Administration sees nothing wrong with taking money from the hard working Amtrak employees who work day and night to provide top quality service to their passengers. These folks are trying to make a living for their families, and they don't deserve this shabby treatment from the President.

It's time for this Administration to step up to the plate and make a decision about Amtrak based on what's best for the traveling public, not what's best for the right wing of the Republican party and the bean counters at OMB.

I represent Central Florida, which depends on tourism for its economy, and we need people to be able to get to the state to enjoy it. Ever since September 11th, more and more people are turning from the airlines to Amtrak, and they deserve safe and dependable service.

And this is just one example of Amtrak's impact on my state. Amtrak runs four long-distance trains through Florida, employs 990 residents with wages totaling over \$43 million, and purchase over \$13 million in goods and services last year alone. And they are doing the same thing in every state they run in.

Some people think that the solution to the problem is to privatize the system. If we privatize, we will see the same thing we saw when we deregulated the airline industry. Only the lucrative routes would be maintained, and routes to Rural locations will be expensive and few.

I was in New York shortly after September 11th when the plane leaving JFK airport crashed into the Bronx. I, along with many of my colleagues in both the House and Senate took Amtrak back to Washington. I realized once again just how important AMTRAK is to the American people, and how important it is for this nation to have alternative modes of Transportation.

This isn't about fiscal policy, this is about providing a safe and reliable public transportation system that the citizens of this Nation need and deserve.

Amtrak was created by Congress in 1970 to take over the money-losing passenger rail service previously operated by private freight railroad companies in the United States.

More than half of all rail passenger routes were eliminated when Amtrak began service on May 1, 1971.

Although Amtrak's route system has remained essentially the same size, it represents a mere skeleton of what was once the United States' passenger rail network.

During the period from Amtrak's inception through 2003, the federal government has spent \$1.89 trillion on air and highway modes. In the same time frame, Amtrak received just over \$30 billion in federal subsidies.

While the United States once had a passenger rail system that was the envy of the world, a lack of capital investment has stalled the advancement of corridor development throughout the country.

Dependent upon an annual federal appropriation, Amtrak's national network is constantly threatened by under-investment, lack of a clearly articulated federal rail policy, and an uncertain future.

Amtrak operates a nationwide rail network, serving over 500 stations in 46 states on

22,000 miles of track with approximately 20,000 employees.

During FY 2004, Amtrak carried just over 25 million passengers, representing an increase of over 4 percent compared to FY 2003.

In addition to operating 300 daily intercity trains, approximately 850,000 commuters each day depend on operating agreements with Amtrak, Amtrak-owned infrastructure, or shared operations.

Amtrak's Northeast Corridor is the heaviest traveled railroad in North America, with over 1,700 trains operating over some portion of the Washington-Boston route each day.

Compared to domestic airlines in FY 2002, Amtrak ranks 8th in ridership with a market share of 4.6 percent and 1st in passengers per frequency.

In FY 2004, Amtrak generated approximately \$2.06 billion in revenues and incurred approximately \$3.18 billion in expenses, covering 65 percent of its operating costs, on par with Canada, Spain and France. No passenger railroad system in the world operates without some form of public subsidy.

Outside the Northeast Corridor, five other corridors carry over one half million people annually. These corridors are: San Diego-Los Angeles-San Luis Obispo; San Jose-Oakland-Sacramento-Auburn; New York-Albany-Buffalo; Oakland-Fresno-Bakersfield; and Vancouver-Seattle-Portland-Eugene.

Amtrak owned property includes 2,141 railroad cars, 425 locomotives, 20 high-speed Acela train sets, a 97 mile segment of 95 mph track in Michigan, a 62 mile segment from New Haven, CT to Springfield, MA, 104 miles of 90 mph track in Pennsylvania, and 363 miles of the Northeast Corridor connecting Washington, Philadelphia, New York and Boston; the busiest passenger line in the country.

All transportation in the United States is directly or indirectly subsidized. Unlike aviation, highways and transit, there is no dedicated fund for investing in passenger rail development. These other modes all operate on predominantly federally owned or federally assisted infrastructure, and rely on government-supported security, research, and traffic controllers.

In FY04, the United States Department of Transportation's \$59 billion budget included \$34 billion for highways, \$14 billion to the FAA, and \$1.217 billion for Amtrak.

Amtrak's FY 2004 appropriation of \$1.217 billion represented 2 percent of the Department of Transportation's \$59 billion budget.

Countries with well-developed passenger rail networks but much smaller populations such as Germany and Japan invest \$3–4 billion annually on passenger rail, representing over 20 percent of their total transportation spending.

In 2000, Canada announced a dedicated source of capital for five years to fund new equipment, modernize infrastructure, and improve its existing passenger railroad network. Canada's system is $\frac{1}{3}$ the size of Amtrak's and has $\frac{1}{6}$ the ridership.

The State of California has invested approximately \$100 million per year in passenger rail over the past 10 years and its state-supported trains carried 4.25 million passengers in FY 2004, representing approximately 17 percent of Amtrak's national total. These trains

are consistently achieving double-digit ridership growth, proving that investment in passenger rail will reap benefits.

Amtrak's corridor services operate over a 6,000-mile route system and serve 23 states, primarily in the Northeast, Midwest and along the Pacific Coast. With the exception of some trains operating between Boston and Washington, which cover their direct operating costs but not the corridor's significant capital costs, none of Amtrak's corridor or state routes covers all of their expenses from fare box revenues.

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Thirteen states provide operating support for 20 different routes, with payments totaling over \$135 million in FY 2004. Many states, including California, Illinois, Oregon, New York, and Washington recognize the benefits of investing in corridor development, and have spent substantial state funds to improve services with positive ridership results.

Currently, Amtrak operates the high-speed Acela Express service, which travels in the Northeast Corridor between New York and Washington in approximately 2 hours 45 minutes, and Boston and New York in approximately 3 hours, 20 minutes. Amtrak now carries 50 percent of the air/rail market between New York and Washington, and 39 percent of the market share between Boston and New York. This is up from 36 percent between New York and Washington and 18 percent between Boston and New York before Acela Express was introduced. This demonstrates travelers will increasingly use a reliable, trip-time competitive alternative to the congestion that is otherwise choking our cities.

Corridors in which states have invested funds to improve trip times and frequencies include the Pacific Surfliners in California and the Cascades Service in the Pacific Northwest. These corridors have multiple frequencies and the potential to become higher-speed rail corridors once infrastructure improvements can be made.

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The route through the Northern part of the country, the Empire Builder, which carried over 437,000 passengers last year, is the only public transportation service in many communities in North Dakota, Montana and Northeastern Washington. For most of the states along the Empire Builder, tourism serves as a major economic engine. A recent study identifying the economic contributions of the Empire Builder demonstrated nearly \$14 million in annual economic benefits to the state of Montana alone.

Long-distance trains also provide transportation during periods of severe weather condi-

tions or emergencies that stall other modes of transportation. This was demonstrated after the September 11 terrorist attacks that grounded air travel. Additionally, these trains provide a strong economic benefit for the states and communities that they serve.

The majority of passengers on the long-distance trains do not travel between the endpoints, but rather to any combination of city pairs. For example, the Southwest Chief, which travels from Chicago to Los Angeles via Kansas City, has 33 stops, creating 528 possible trip combinations.

Most of Amtrak's expenditures are due to the immense capital needs of its infrastructure, particularly the Northeast Corridor, not the operating costs of the long distance trains. These operating cost figures should be cited with caution.

Critics often refer to the "loss per passenger" of the long distance trains. However, each long distance train passenger is the equivalent of five short distance train passengers because of the greater distances traveled. More importantly, these "loss per passenger" figures often include not only the "avoidable" costs of operating individual long distance trains (such as the cost of diesel fuel) but all of the shared costs that Amtrak incurs for the benefit of both long-distance and corridor trains (such as the cost of mechanical facilities, Amtrak's computer systems, and stations like Los Angeles Union Station). Including shared costs produces inflated and misleading "loss" figures, since these costs will not go away if long distance trains are eliminated.

Eliminating all long distance trains would produce negligible cost savings in the first few years because of the requirement that Amtrak pay labor protection to impacted employees. When these payments ended after five years, the savings would still be minimal: around \$300 million annually.

Eliminating individual long distance trains produce even fewer savings: most of the shared costs of Amtrak's long distance network, such as the costs of maintenance facilities that serve multiple long distance trains, would remain. Additionally, Amtrak continues to make changes to its long-distance trains that will improve revenue and finances for the system.

Amtrak recently exited from the mail and express business, resulting in shorter and more convenient schedules, with reduced labor costs. The repair of wreck-damaged equipment continues and will allow Amtrak to increase capacity, and therefore revenues, on long distance trains, which often sell out. These changes should help further reduce the losses of long-distance trains.

Amtrak's right to operate passenger trains over freight railroads comes from the Rail Passenger Service Act. This act states that: Amtrak has the right to access all rail lines in the U.S. to operate intercity passenger trains and; Amtrak trains have dispatching preference over freight trains.

With the exception of trains over the Northeast Corridor between Washington, DC, and Boston, MA, Amtrak trains operate over tracks owned and managed by the nation's freight railroad companies.

In the past, congestion on these freight routes has caused delays for Amtrak trains,

however, this past summer has seen significant delays and inconveniences to Amtrak's passengers across the country.

Amtrak's 5-year Strategic Plan, which was approved by its Board of Directors on June 10, 2004, specifies that approximately \$1.8 billion will be required for fiscal year 2006.

According to a recent report by the Congressional Research Service, both the now defunct Amtrak Reform Council and the DOT-IG acknowledge the need for at least \$1.5 billion in capital and operating support.

Seeking no funds for direct Amtrak expenses and ceding control of the railroad to a bankruptcy trustee, whose legal responsibility is to Amtrak's creditors, represents a drastic and unrealistic turnaround in the Administration's policy.

Since David Gunn's arrival, Amtrak Total Ridership has increased by 11.6 percent. The number of intercity trains operated have increased by 21.4 percent. The number of trains on the NEC has increased by 29.2 percent while others have increased by 17.3 percent.

Ridership on the NEC is 10 percent and other corridor trains, like the Pacific Surfliner, Capitals and San Juans in California and the Cascades in Oregon and Washington have increased by 27 percent driving a 12 percent increase in ticket revenue.

Americans have chosen it as their form of travel in record numbers. In the 3 years post September 11th, Amtrak has proven its value to the nation and has increased its ridership steadily.

Last year, Amtrak carried 25 million passengers, up from the previous year's record. When given the option, travelers choose Amtrak over other, less convenient forms of travel. In FY04 the air-rail market from DC to New York was split 50 percent to 50 percent, Los Angeles to San Diego was 30 percent to 70 percent and Portland to Seattle was 30 percent to 61 percent.

David Gunn has made real progress reforming the railroad since taking the helm in May of 2002. Over the last 30 months he has decreased the workforce by more than 22 percent, removing unnecessary layers on management, increased train service and operation, eliminated and realigned routes for greater efficiency and implemented more internal reforms than any of its previous CEOs.

In fact, Amtrak's core operating expenses are lower today than they were when he took over. David Gunn has made real reforms and has proven to be the right person to continue fixing the problems that have plagued Amtrak over the years.

HEALTH CARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. INGELIS of South Carolina). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, tonight, as part of the Republican Health Care Public Affairs Team, my co-chair, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MURPHY), and I are here with a couple of our colleagues to talk about, over

the next hour, one of the most important things to the people of this great country, and that is health care and our health care system.

We have a great system, without question, probably the greatest health care system on Earth. But we are not going to just stand up here during this next hour or as we go forward with our Health Care Public Affairs Team and on a monthly basis, talk about different health care issues that are so important to this Nation and pat ourselves on the back. We are not going to do that. We are going to talk about some problems that exist.

Tonight, we are going to focus primarily on the civil justice system and trying to solve a problem in regard to medical liability insurance and the lack of access to care. But there are so many other issues that we will be talking about as we go forward in this series of 1-hour discussions with our colleagues, Mr. Speaker. Things like Medicaid. Obviously, we have got a serious problem with Medicaid. We need to reform that system, and the President talked about many of these things in his State of the Union address. We addressed, of course, Medicare modernization and the prescription drug act last year. In fact, December of 2003 is when that bill was signed by President Bush.

But we will continue to focus on Medicare in realizing that it is not a perfect system. It is a good system. It has served our people well, but it is not perfect.

Then, of course, the issue of the uninsured, some 43 million in this country. Many of them, Mr. Speaker, have jobs. They work. They are not unemployed, but they are underemployed and, in many cases, are not insured at all. They do not have the opportunity to purchase health insurance. Maybe it is not even offered by their employer, or if it is, they cannot afford to purchase that insurance. And my colleague, the co-chairman of this Republican Health Care Public Affairs Team who is with us tonight, will be speaking in just a few minutes. We will be talking about, also, just the issue of electronic medical record keeping and how important that is to reduce the number of errors, medical errors that we know cause far too many injuries and, yes, in some cases, loss of life in this country. The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MURPHY) will talk about that.

The main emphasis tonight, of course, as I stated, Mr. Speaker, will be to talk about this issue of medical liability and why it is causing such anguish in our country and resulting in the lack of timely and necessary access to health care.

I am often asked, I am a physician Member, I think, Mr. Speaker, you know that, and my colleagues are aware of that. I came to this body after practicing OB-GYN medicine in my district, the 11th district of Georgia,

the City of Marietta, Cobb County of Georgia, where I delivered over 5,200 babies. And it was tough to give up that practice. But without question, I was beginning to feel a lot of stress, a lot of anxiety, frustration in my medical practice as I watched those medical liability insurance premiums just continue to skyrocket and get up to the point where it was awfully difficult to be able to afford that.

So this is really what a lot of my colleagues are going through. I have also had people back in the district say, now, I think you have a lot of doctors and a lot of health care providers in the Congress now. Did we not elect a few more? In fact, we did in this 109th Congress. We grew our numbers a little bit, Mr. Speaker. We went from a grand total of seven M.D.'s to ten in the House, and of course, we have a number of other health care providers, be they nurses or dentists or pharmacists or psychologists, but it is still a small number.

When we look at 435 Members, and maybe we have something less than 20 who have a background in health care, in the health care professions, and on the Senate side, we increased our number over there by 100 percent this time. We went from one to two. And, of course, I am speaking of the majority leader of the Senate, Dr. FRIST, and also, now, Senator COBURN from the great State of Oklahoma.

But we are determined to talk about this health care issue and make sure the American people know that, while we might not be large in numbers, we are going to discuss these issues. We are going to do it on a regular basis.

The Republican hour tonight, of which we are managing, we are going to get this issue in front of our colleagues, in front of the public and let them know that we care about this. It is a tremendously important issue, and it should not be partisan.

When you think about it, health care, when you have a patient, you never ask them if they are a Republican or a Democrat. And believe you me, they do not ask their doctor either. President Reagan joked about that when he was shot and went to the hospital and looked up just before they put him to sleep, looked up at the anesthesiologist and said, I sure hope we got some good Republicans in here. But truly, we have, as I say, there are ten M.D.'s in the House, three on the Democratic side, seven on the Republican side. But we are not going to let this be a partisan issue.

We are going to just talk to our colleagues and make sure that everybody understands that we need to do this for the good of the country and not for the good of a party or, in particular, not with our vision, our focus on the next election.

The issue of medical liability and the crisis that we are in, Mr. Speaker, I